

Documents on Diplomacy: The Source

"The Abasement of Congress"

Louis Guillaume Otto to Comte de Vergennes, New York, June 17, 1786

My lord;

The abasement into which Congress has fallen since the peace begins to arouse the attention of all true patriots. It is felt that it is impossible for the federal Government to remain in its current inaction without placing the esteem of the United States and its very independence in danger. Indeed, the most pressing recommendations of this Assembly are treated by most of the States with an indifference that causes people less susceptible to taking part in public affairs to groan. The Department of Finances has never been as destitute as it is at this moment, and one of the Commissioners has assured me that it has nothing more with which to meet current expenses. The most important members of Congress do all that is in their power to have several articles added to the act of the Confederation that the current situation of affairs appears to render indispensable. It is proposed to give Congress executive powers, and the right exclusively to make emissions of paper money and to regulate commerce, it is desired moreover that this assembly be divided into two Chambers in order to prevent an eloquent and ill-intentioned member from carrying all the votes. As for the executive power, My Lord, the Confederation will always be unsteady as

long as Congress has not obtained this important point. The idea of a sovereign Body that has only the right to deliberate and to recommend is repugnant to reason, and in spite of the jealousy of a great number of individuals in America, one cannot conceal from oneself the inconsequence of such a system of government. The continual rotation of members of Congress is another inconvenience whose baneful effects are felt more and more; it is difficult for men who only make a journey from one end of the Continent to the other and who only stay a few weeks in New York to be familiar with affairs. Be that as it may, My Lord, much time and many negotiations will be necessary to have these defects corrected, and it is impossible to foresee the end of the current difficulties.

I am with a profound respect, My Lord, Your most humble and most Obedient Servant,

OTTO

Source

The Emerging Nation: A Documentary History of the Foreign Relations of the United States under the Articles of Confederation, 1780-1789, Mary A. Giunta, Editor-in-Chief, Volume III. Washington, DC : Government Printing Office, 1996.

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